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Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 477th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Wednesday, 7 October 1992, at 3.15 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

CONTENTS

General debate (continued)

Adoption of the report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

Adoption of the report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection (A/AC.96/802)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited Mr. de Riedmatten, Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection to introduce the Sub-Committee's report (A/AC.96/802).

2. Mr. de RIEDMATTEN (Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection) said that the Sub-Committee's work had focused on three topics: first, the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/802), which contained the conclusions of the internal UNHCR Working Group on International Protection on the main challenges now facing international protection; secondly, the progress report on implementation of the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women (EC/SC.2/55), with particular emphasis on the importance attached by States to the continued discussion of how to integrate refugee women fully into UNHCR's philosophy; and, thirdly, the information note on UNHCR's activities for refugee law promotion, dissemination and training (EC/SCP/73). The Sub-Committee had also discussed the follow-up to its work and had reached the decision contained in paragraph 33 of its report. The last topic it had discussed was the conclusion on cessation of status, which was contained in paragraph 51 of the report.

3. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee adopted the report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection (A/AC.96/802).

4. It was so decided.

5. Mr. MWANDA (Zambia) said that, with the emergence of peace in the traditional refugee-producing countries in southern Africa, a drop was expected in the number of refugees in Zambia, which had stood at 135,000 the previous year. He nevertheless urged the Executive Committee to be mindful of Zambia's economic hardships and said that the new Government, which had taken over a completely run-down economy and faced a drought whose end was not in sight, could not afford to deal effectively with the refugees' needs, not to mention those of its own nationals.

6. Zambia appreciated UNHCR's financial difficulties and was grateful for the assistance the High Commissioner continued to provide refugees through regular programmes. There had been a marked improvement in UNHCR activities in established refugee settlements. However, only 50,000 of 135,000 spontaneously settled refugees in Zambia lived in UNHCR-assisted refugee settlements, leaving the majority to fend for themselves under tragic conditions. Zambia had reported the situation to both the first and second International Conferences on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA I and ICARA II) and had submitted five project proposals to improve the living conditions of the spontaneously settled refugees, whose situation had further worsened as a result of drought. A contribution of $1.9 million was urgently required to rehabilitate health centres, while another ICARA II project for the construction of roads whose bad condition was seriously delaying repatriation had still not received the required $3 million in donor support.

7. Southern Africa was experiencing the worst drought in living memory and it only heightened the importance of the High Commissioner's strategies to prevent people from fleeing their countries in search of food.

8. He assured the Executive Committee that his Government would work to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees, which had been made possible as a result of peace in the southern African region.

9. Mr. FAROUQUE (Sri Lanka) said that the opening statement by the High Commissioner and the overview of UNHCR activities (A/AC.96/798) had confirmed the fact that the refugee situation throughout the world had become increasingly complex, both in theoretical and in practical terms, and had required a flexible interpretation of UNHCR's mandate and cooperation with other United Nations agencies in their individual spheres of competence. In such crisis situations and in an international context where the distinction between political and humanitarian dimensions was often unclear, UNHCR's strength undoubtedly lay in its traditional and neutral role, which guaranteed refugee protection and the promotion of durable solutions. Its multi-faceted experience in the humanitarian field gave it the required flexibility to act as a lead agency in cases of humanitarian emergencies.

10. For almost five years, his Government had fully benefited from UNHCR's flexible and adaptable mandate and, in 1987, had signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the provision of assistance and rehabilitation to returnees from southern India. Under the programme, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, had catered to the needs of about 43,000 persons. Unfortunately, those efforts had been interrupted by the resumption of violence by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), whose terrorist activities, aimed at creating a separate mono-ethnic State in the north and east of Sri Lanka, continued to cause immeasurable suffering to the civilian populations of those areas and forced a large number of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims to flee as refugees. Despite the interruption of the initial phase of that programme, UNHCR had been able successfully to continue its operations in the north and east of the country at two open relief centres and seven subcentres and, in cooperation with other international agencies such as ICRC, it ensured each month the distribution of approximately $5 million of supplies provided by the Government.

11. The latest phase of UNHCR activities in Sri Lanka related to the bilateral arrangement between the Governments of Sri Lanka and India for the voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees in South India, under which 30,000 Sri Lankans had returned under UNHCR supervision. In June 1992, UNHCR had appealed to the international community for an estimated $6.2 million for a programme to assist the resettlement of the refugees in their original places of residence in areas declared safe. The Government of Sri Lanka was sparing no effort to settle the returnees and provided them with a settling-in allowance, a productive enterprise grant, a housing grant and an initial quota of food rations. The success of the current phase of repatriation would depend on a long-term political solution. The Government of Sri Lanka continued to call on the LTTE to renounce the path of violence and participate with all other democratic political parties in Sri Lanka in seeking a negotiated political solution which, in conjunction with long-term development and rehabilitation assistance, remained the only means of eliminating the root causes of civilian displacement in Sri Lanka.

12. U TIN KYAW HLAING (Observer for Myanmar), referring to the movement of persons in the Myanmar-Bangladesh border areas, said that, according, to the joint statement issued by the two countries' Ministers for Foreign Affairs in April 1992 and the subsequent follow-up agreements, the Myanmar authorities had arranged to resettle the repatriates in their original places of residence. Five reception camps had been kept open since May 1992 and the Government had provided all essential requirements for the returnees, including arrangements for transport and security. The two Governments held regular coordination meetings, the most recent having taken place in September 1992. At the invitation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Myanmar, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had visited Myanmar to observe the situation in the border area; a Study Group had held discussions with the Myanmar authorities as well as with village elders and religious leaders. Journalists and members of the diplomatic corps in Yangon, as well as a correspondent of the British Broadcasting Corporation, had inspected some of the reception camps for returnees.

13. He assured the Executive Committee that the Myanmar authorities had taken the necessary steps to inspire confidence in the returnees, including the formation of a high-level General Supervision Committee. In addition, officials of the two Governments were holding regular cooperation meetings to coordinate safe voluntary repatriation. Likewise, comprehensive steps had been taken to receive the returnees at the five reception camps and resettle them in their original homes as well as to attend to their immediate and longer-term needs. Funds had been allocated for those measures, which his delegation felt confident would contribute towards the returnees' rehabilitation and reintegration.

14. The measures had already produced positive results, the first batch of 46 returnees having been resettled at their original homes in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Sittway and visited by the Bangladesh delegation, which had expressed satisfaction with the arrangements.

15. With regard to the concern expressed in certain quarters about Myanmar residents, the matter had been exaggerated by certain sections of the media hostile to Myanmar and, especially, by terrorist groups within and outside the country. By terrorizing the residents, certain organizations had been largely responsible for frightening them into fleeing to Bangladesh in the first place and were hampering the flow of returnees. Nevertheless, measures had been taken in good faith; the authorities were confident that the flow of refugees would gain momentum and hoped that well-wishers would put their trust in them. The spirit of cooperation, understanding and good-neighbourliness between the two countries had already borne fruit.

16. Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt) said that the High Commissioner had provided a comprehensive review of UNHCR's activities as well as proposals for a methodological approach to the worldwide refugee problem. Sound treatment of that problem was not limited to providing humanitarian assistance, but required a search for political solutions to conflicts on the basis of international law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

17. The refugee problem in Africa was extremely dangerous, not only on account of its magnitude, with the astounding figure of more than 6 million refugees and 12 million displaced persons, but even more so because of the unprecedented suffering caused by drought, famine, deteriorating medical care and the lack of security which threatened people's very existence.

18. His delegation supported the statement by the Chairman of the OAU Commission of Fifteen on Refugees, who had drawn attention to the need for intensified and coordinated efforts by all the organizations involved in providing humanitarian aid. He noted that the amount allocated to Africa in the General Programme for 1993 was some $40 million lower than in 1992, a trend that was inconsistent with UNHCR's assistance responsibilities in Africa.

19. The situation in Somalia had become critical. In addition to 2 million Somalis threatened by drought and hunger within Somalia, a further 1 million were under threat in neighbouring countries. He expressed his delegation's satisfaction with the decision of the Security Council to set up an airlift and to send United Nations forces to protect the commendable relief efforts being carried out. He hoped that the meeting to coordinate humanitarian aid to Somalia, which was due to be held in Geneva on 12 and 13 October, would mobilize further efforts that would, together with those of OAU, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, help to solve the problem in the Horn of Africa. Egypt was actively participating in the search for lasting solutions to preserve peace and security, save the lives of victims and allow them to return and lead normal lives in Somalia.

20. With regard to the situation in southern Africa, it was to be hoped that current efforts would lead to the abolition of apartheid in South Africa and encourage the rapid return of its exiled refugees. Nevertheless, the presence of 1.5 million refugees from Mozambique in Malawi and in other neighbouring States seriously overburdened their capacity to feed even their own populations and was a source of particular concern. He welcomed the agreement signed in Rome on 4 October 1992 by the Government of Mozambique and RENAMO and hoped that it would lead to a permanent and stable political solution that would allow refugees to return home. It was also to be hoped that the problem of refugees in western Africa would soon be settled and the efforts being made by ECOWAS in that regard deserved full support.

21. The ongoing tragedy in the former Yugoslavia and, in particular, in Bosnia and Herzegovina intensified each day in ferocity, affecting the basic rights of 2.5 million persons, in particular the Muslim population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was suffering as a result of ethnic cleansing and even genocide. A total of 400,000 persons were currently threatened by death from hunger and cold during the winter months.

22. Despite that bleak outlook, he hoped that the Comprehensive Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in the Former Yugoslavia, drawn up at the International Meeting on Humanitarian Aid for Victims of the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia, held at Geneva on 29 July 1992, would be effectively implemented. He was pleased to note that the airlift to Sarajevo had resumed after the High Commissioner's success in concluding an agreement between the parties to the conflict on 19 September. Although the humanitarian relief effort should be given full support, the real solution lay in respect for the sovereignty and independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in non-interference in its internal affairs and in an end to the aggression by the Belgrade Government and its Serbian militias.

23. In the past year, UNHCR had registered impressive achievements in northern Iraq, in the voluntary repatriation of Afghan and Cambodian refugees and in dealing with the refugee flows from Myanmar and Bhutan. The tasks

defined by the High Commissioner represented a comprehensive methodology for dealing with the world refugee situation on the basis of practical experience and thorough research and held out hope that UNHCR would achieve its lofty aim.

24. Lastly, his delegation appreciated the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799) and noted that it made no attempt to redefine UNHCR's mandate with regard to the legal protection of refugees. The trend towards providing protection in countries of origin should be regarded as a preventive measure that had to be taken on the basis of the agreement of and consultation with the country concerned.

25. Mr. AKTAN (Turkey) said the Executive Committee was meeting at a time when appalling human suffering was occurring all over the world on a scale reminiscent of the Second World War. UNHCR had been trying to adapt itself to that situation and to play an active role in providing relief, emergency response and humanitarian assistance.

26. The most recent example was the tragedy in the former Yugoslavia, where UNHCR's activities would gain in momentum and efficiency if contributions by the international community were increased. His country was ready and willing to do its utmost in that respect. In addition, the role of UNPROFOR in delivering humanitarian aid deserved encouragement and further strengthening. Turkey welcomed the new approach recommended in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799), which reflected the Office's willingness to play a more active role in responding to new types of protection needs.

27. The recent increase in cross-border movements and internal displacements had aggravated an already difficult situation. Given the ambiguous attitude of the international community towards ethnic conflicts, as well as the potential for the breakdown of political order, it would not be surprising if the number of both immigrants and displaced persons were to rise dramatically in the near future. However, UNHCR should become involved in internal displacements only at the request of the international community and with the consent of the State concerned: only thus could its neutrality be safeguarded.

28. The proposal for the creation of safety zones in countries of origin needed further study and emphasis should be placed on enabling the displaced persons to return to their original areas of settlement. It should not be forgotten that the creation of safety zones might help to serve certain undesirable ends, such as "ethnic cleansing". The voluntary repatriation of displaced persons should be an important aspect of refugee law and UNHCR should continue to stress that aspect.

29. He paid special tribute to UNHCR for the guidance and assistance it had given to refugee women and children, two vulnerable groups in need of special care. Turkey was also grateful to the Office for its constructive work in repatriating the Iraqi refugees of Kurdish, Christian and Turcoman origin that had been sheltered by Turkey since the end of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1988. Under that programme, some 17,000 Iraqis had returned to their country and that return was still continuing.

30. Mr. IDOYAGI (Uruguay) said his Government wished to thank the High Commissioner and her Office for their selfless humanitarian work. UNHCR's report on its activities (A/AC.96/793) painted an alarming picture of the scale and complexity of the current refugee problem. Massive refugee movements were

now occurring on every continent, caused increasingly by acts of violence of ethnic or religious origin, human rights violations, internal conflicts and political instability. His delegation supported the new approach that UNHCR was taking to respond to that new situation, particularly by establishing mechanisms which would ensure that protection could be afforded more effectively and speedily wherever it was needed. The Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799) provided an excellent basis for progress in that direction. He stressed, however, that any strategy designed to strengthen international protection and to develop new solutions should preserve the institution of asylum, as well as the cardinal principles of refugee status and, in particular, non-refoulement and non-discrimination.

31. Any further steps towards defining and clarifying the scope of the new concept of temporary protection should take into account the fundamental role of asylum. Thus, while reaffirming asylum as a basic instrument of protection, UNHCR should continue to promote the right of all refugees to demand and to enjoy asylum. He agreed with the High Commissioner that all efforts should be made to establish efficient and fair procedures which ensured that valid claims to refugee status were duly and expeditiously recognized. At the same time, it was now not only appropriate, but essential that refugee status should be defined on a group basis: that solution had been necessitated by the fact that the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol had been overtaken by the massive displacements now going on. The solutions reached under certain regional agreements could help in achieving progress in that direction.

32. Where UNHCR's mandate was concerned, his Government supported the growing consensus that the Office's competence should be extended to cover those who had been forced to abandon their country of origin due to internal conflicts, widespread human rights violations or acts of violence. Likewise, his Government believed that ways should be found of granting protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, as and when UNHCR's participation was deemed advisable by the international community.

33. His delegation was pleased to note that understanding of the close and complex relationship between refugees, migrations and development was increasing day by day. Uruguay supported the launching of quick-impact projects in the context of repatriation operations, which would facilitate the transition from the assistance phase to the development phase.

34. In view of the fact that the ever-widening gap between developing and developed countries not only increased massive migratory flows, but also endangered new and often fragile democracies, it was vital that the efforts of those developing countries, especially in the Latin American region, which had applied painful structural adjustment programmes and were converting to a market economy, should be matched by corresponding efforts on the part of the industrialized countries.

35. UNHCR's emphasis on preventive action to avoid massive refugee movements was of great importance. Prevention activities could play a vital role, provided that they were based on the principle that prevention was not a substitute for asylum. Given the causal link between grave human rights violations and the creation of refugee flows, close collaboration and coordination on the part of UNHCR with the Centre for Human Rights was bound to be fruitful. Within the limits of UNHCR's mandate and competence, equally beneficial results could be obtained by close coordination with the political,

humanitarian and security activities of the United Nations system and by supporting the peace-keeping activities of the Secretary-General.

36. Mr. ENNACEUR (Tunisia) said that the High Commissioner was to be commended for her energy and devotion in the refugee cause. The current crisis was unprecedented in its scope and, as she had rightly pointed out, had severely tested UNHCR's capacity to respond and its ability to innovate.

37. Among the many problems facing the Office, three were of special importance: its capacity to respond and to intervene in emergency situations in a speedy and effective manner; the guarantee of the right of asylum as the fundamental principle of refugee protection; and the management of available human and financial resources. Where the first problem was concerned, the measures taken by the High Commissioner, including the setting up of five 22-person regional emergency teams and one 40-person standby team, had not yet proved fully effective. The reason given had been that UNHCR's staff were already stretched to the limit and it had not been possible to second enough of them to make up full emergency teams for operations either inside or outside their region. In other words, the vital mechanism for responding to emergency situations had proved unworkable in practice because of inadequate manpower. The situation was a serious one, and he urged that UNHCR's capacity to respond should continue to be given priority consideration by the Executive Committee.

38. In so doing, the Executive Committee would need to look into the question whether the failure to muster adequate emergency teams was simply due to lack of available staff or whether there were other, qualitative reasons. One reason might be the lack of security in areas of operation in certain regions: in the case of Somalia, for example, it had been pointed out that, whereas private relief groups were staffed by volunteers, United Nations staff were civil servants who could hardly be expected to take risks. One solution to that problem, which had already been recommended to the Executive Committee, was that UNHCR should subcontract part of its emergency response activities to non-governmental organizations on a partnership basis. Some agreements of that kind had already been concluded and he believed that more should be done in that direction. Indeed, in future, UNHCR might envisage delegating more and more of its operational activities to subcontractors, while strengthening its own role in such areas as programme planning and control and, in particular, in the most important area of its mandate, namely, refugee protection.

39. It was in the field of protection that UNHCR faced the most severe of its many challenges. It was currently being called on not only to shelter and feed 17 million refugees and to prepare their return to their countries of origin, but also to persuade its member States to accept the right of asylum at a time when that right was being increasingly disputed by public opinion under the influence of xenophobia and racism, as well as by legislation which reinforced existing geographical frontiers by psychological and cultural frontiers.

40. Tunisia endorsed the recommendation by the Working Group on International Protection that the international community should support UNHCR's efforts to "demand and obtain" minimal standards of protection against discrimination, refoulement and expulsion for persons falling within its competence, as well as fundamental guarantees of humane treatment and respect for other human rights, such as the right to family unity. It also agreed with the Working Group's conclusion that it was not yet time for UNHCR to seek to develop new

international instruments relating to refugees: the problem was not so much how to develop new instruments, but how to implement those that already existed. The main problem today was not simply the lack of resources to meet humanitarian needs: it was rather how to ensure respect for humanitarian law at a time when that law was being flouted as never before.

41. If that were to be done, there was need for international political will. He believed that the time had come to call for the convening of an international conference whose task would be to ensure that the world's refugees received the protection to which they were entitled and he suggested that the Executive Committee might take up that recommendation as part of its efforts to strengthen UNHCR's protection role.

42. Concerning the management of UNHCR's human and financial resources, he had noted with great concern from the Report of the Board of Auditors (A/AC.96/797) that there had been cases of the misappropriation of funds and, in particular, an abnormal increase in losses of property in 1991. That situation called for increased vigilance and stricter control of financial management, especially by further developing the internal evaluation programme. Only thus would UNHCR be able to ensure that it could respond adequately to the pressing needs of refugees.

43. He hoped that UNHCR would strengthen its traditional activities before venturing into new fields. Where prevention was concerned, it should take care that its intervention did not involve interference in the internal affairs of countries and should ensure that any sanctions imposed did not further aggravate the situation of refugees and displaced persons. UNHCR's humanitarian action should always be totally detached from politics if it was to be effective and speedy.

44. International cooperation in humanitarian work should be strengthened and he welcomed UNHCR's recent collaboration with other bodies such as UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The High Commissioner should continue to pursue initiatives such as the cross-border action in the Horn of Africa, designed to meet the most pressing needs of all categories of sufferers, whether refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons or indigenous groups.

45. Regional cooperation had also proved a fruitful approach, as had been shown by the concerted action taken by UNHCR, the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to assist Somalia. However, since Africa contained one half of the world's refugees, it deserved greater attention on the part of UNHCR and should be given adequate resources to deal with its problems.

46. Tunisia was deeply concerned at the distressing situation of Palestinians who were living in camps in the occupied Arab territories and were still deprived of any kind of international protection. He hoped that the peace process initiated at the Madrid Conference would bring an end to the sufferings of the Palestinian people and restore their legitimate and inalienable rights.

47. Mr. OYARCE (Chile) said the international consensus on the need to respect human freedom and dignity had not led to any improvement where the lot of refugees was concerned. Outbreaks of violence, often for ethnic reasons, conflicts and, above all, the increasing difficulties encountered by many

sectors of society in playing any role in the international economic structure had tended to increase refugee flows. Over-population, extreme poverty and natural disasters were inevitably part of the overall problem of refugees.

48. He congratulated the secretariat on the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799), which gave a realistic picture of the problems facing UNHCR and the prospects for their solution. Any solutions chosen would need to combine respect for internal policy with solidarity between crisis countries and host countries. He wished briefly to refer to a number of important points made in the Note.

49. First, there was clearly a growing awareness that UNHCR's mandate and competence extended to various categories not necessarily catered for in existing positive law within the meaning of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The situation and protection requirements of internally displaced persons should be more carefully studied, for which purpose the spirit and letter of the Cartagena Declaration should be borne in mind. In that field, there were elements of progressive development in international refugee law which would probably acquire, in practice, the status of lex ferenda.

50. A second aspect, and a central point of protection, was the notion of temporary protection, which should not be interpreted as a substitute for or alternative to the right of asylum. The scope of that notion should be clarified so that the theoretical and practical concept of the status of refugees would not be weakened. Rational approaches to solutions could not undermine principles such as asylum, non-refoulement and non-discrimination.

51. A third aspect dealt with in the Note was the concept of safe zones. To a certain extent, that concept had been applied in his country with positive results, providing refugees from third countries with protection in times of internal conflict. The model suggested was not new and warranted further study, since it represented a viable option in times of crisis.

52. A fourth aspect contained in the Note was the concept of preventive diplomacy, which reflected an innovative approach within the United Nations system; its scope would necessarily cover forms of cooperation and facilities to stimulate economic growth and development in many countries of origin. In that regard, Government decisions in Latin America, including Chile, had led to the development of structural adjustment programmes aimed at greater resource allocation and a more efficient integration of their economies into the international system. Such unilateral policies, which entailed a high social cost, must receive an appropriate response from the entire international trade system with a view to opening up markets for exports, in order to promote sustainable development and thereby eradicate the causes of political instability and threats to democracy, thus reducing the risk of refugee flows. Likewise, the factors stemming from ethnic and religious intolerance and unbridled nationalism required a preventive approach; there, too, the United Nations could play an instructive role, particularly by promoting cooperation with the Centre for Human Rights.

53. It would also be as well, in developing the prevention concept, for it to be linked with peace-keeping operations, respect for human rights, strengthening the rule of law and the promotion of a set of variables aimed at eliminating the various causes of refugee situations. The concept of early-warning had great potential in that regard. His delegation was interested in the development of a

consensus approach which would enable UNHCR to meet protection requirements by means of mechanisms which would be in keeping with current positive law, but also contribute to the search for durable solutions and promote voluntary repatriation, with free consent, according to objective criteria to guarantee safety in countries of origin.

54. Mr. NGONGI (World Food Programme) said that his organization's revised working arrangements with UNHCR, which had been approved in October 1991 and had come into operation on 1 January 1992, were progressing in a smooth and harmonious manner. Phase 1 of the new Memorandum of Understanding regarding resource mobilization of all basic food commodities to refugee and returnee feeding operations had now been completed. WFP deliveries of basic food commodities to refugee programmes worldwide had increased from 600,000 tonnes in 1990 to over 1 million tonnes in 1991 and commitments in 1992 to protracted operations and emergencies were expected to exceed 1.4 million tonnes valued at $455 million, while projected 1993 requirements were 1.5 million tonnes valued at $464 million. 1992 had been a record year and, regrettably, no reduction was anticipated for 1993. The above figures did not include requirements for at least a further 500,000 tonnes of basic food commodities for internally displaced persons in countries such as Somalia, Mozambique, Iraq and Afghanistan.

55. Internal transport of food aid to refugees was an important element lending added urgency to WFP's increased involvement in refugee feeding operations. Some $96.5 million had been spent by WFP on such costs between 1988 and 1991 and $74 million had already been mobilized for the same purpose for 1992. Until now, WFP had concentrated on mobilizing funds for internal transport, storage and handling and had reimbursed UNHCR for the costs it had incurred. However, although the official date for the transfer of such responsibilities from UNHCR had been set for 1 January 1993, WFP had already begun in 1992 to take on the work of actually transporting food commodities to extended delivery points. It was now moving food internally to two thirds of all refugee operations in over 20 countries and would handle almost all such operations by the end of 1993.

56. Increased involvement in refugee feeding operations and the delivery of food commodities had created a need for more efficient food tracking. Accordingly, a system called Food Availability Status Reports FASREPS had been set up to show the current stock position and the projection of arrivals, future shipments, expected drawdowns and requirements over a period of six months. The reports, which were constantly updated, had proved extremely valuable in alerting WFP and UNHCR to any possible breakdown of supplies, thus facilitating preventive action.

57. While improved information flow and coordination arrangements had helped considerably to secure the food pipeline in most refugee operations, they had, regrettably, not guaranteed problem-free operations in all cases. The situation of Somali refugees in Kenya showed how difficult it was to ensure a regular flow and a secure food pipeline to an extremely volatile refugee caseload. The budget had had to be amended 4 times within the space of 10 months, the commodity commitment being increased considerably each time. The plan for a cross-mandate, cross-border approach drawn up jointly with UNHCR and UNICEF allowed for the use of food commodities across frontiers to prevent larger refugee influxes into neighbouring countries and to accommodate drought victims in refugee feeding centres.

58. The current year had been the heaviest emergency food aid period experienced in the more than 30 years since WFP had come into existence. Up to 30 September 1992, some 2.4 million tonnes of food aid with a value of over $1 billion had been committed for emergency and refugee feeding operations. Progress achieved in Cambodia, Angola, Eritrea and Ethiopia had been outweighed by new exoduses caused by strife situations in Somalia, Mozambique and the former Yugoslavia. Refugee numbers had again increased overall and WFP and UNHCR would have to face another difficult year in 1993. Accordingly, WFP had reviewed its procedures, adopting a regional operations approach to situations such as the Liberia conflict, the southern Africa drought and events in the Gulf region.

59. Several tragic events during the year had dramatically illustrated the risks involved in the delivery of emergency food. WFP therefore welcomed the setting up of the Departments of Humanitarian Affairs and of Peace-Keeping Operations within the United Nations, both of which should facilitate the delivery and distribution of emergency food aid. In order to ensure collaboration with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, two WFP staff members had been made available to that Department, one in New York and the other in Geneva.

60. WFP appreciated the excellent cooperation it had received from the High Commissioner and her staff during the past year, as well as the enormous support it had received from donors. Although it was still under-resourced, with commitments exceeding pledges, it hoped that additional contributions would be forthcoming. He also thanked the countries hosting refugees and the many non-governmental organizations which helped WFP in the distribution and physical delivery of food commodities, including the organization of supplementary and therapeutic feeding in refugee situations.

61. Ms. von BUCHWALD (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) paid tribute to the excellent cooperation which her organization and its associated members around the world enjoyed as partners of UNHCR and said that reinforcing preparedness and the capacity to respond to emergencies, particularly at the local and regional levels, had to remain a high priority issue. Impartiality in the granting of aid was essential; refugees should be protected and assisted regardless of who they were and of what circumstances led to their suffering. Another fundamental Red Cross principle was that of serving the neediest; the most vulnerable should always be reached first, wherever they were. Increasing calls for assistance in refugee-like situations should not diminish the support given to so-called "mandate" refugees and humanitarian aid should, whenever necessary, be linked with development aid and the building up and strengthening of local institutions.

62. With regard to emergency response, the International Federation welcomed UNHCR's efforts to advance standby arrangements with experienced organizations for needs assessment and implementation. It recommended that flexibility should be maintained in the choice of partners and that priority should be given to local institutions with proven or potential competence. In connection with assistance delivery, it noted with great satisfaction that UNHCR was adopting community-based approaches that emphasized participation by the beneficiaries. Such efforts were to be encouraged, since they not only helped to restore dignity and self-reliance in a dehumanizing situation, but also often proved to be cost-effective. The International Federation also strongly supported the comprehensive approach adopted by UNHCR in its voluntary repatriation

programmes; a similar approach should be adopted more frequently in respect of communities hosting refugees where the local population suffered from having to share scarce resources. The renewed emphasis on social services and, in particular, on dealing with the psychological effects of trauma in refugee populations was to be welcomed; if not dealt with, traumatic experiences could leave lasting scars, especially in children.

63. Turning to the issue of the strengthening of refugee law, humanitarian law and human rights generally, she said that her organization fully endorsed UNHCR's current efforts to introduce the relevant international instruments to Central and Eastern European Governments. Only a firm commitment to those instruments could improve prospects for lasting solutions to refugee and displaced persons situations and possibly avert future refugee flows.

64. Mr. HASEGAWA (United Nations Volunteers) said that UNV could take specific steps in four of the six areas of UNHCR's forward-looking strategy outlined by the High Commissioner in her opening statement. First, the UNV programme had provided UNHCR with professional expertise and technical skills in support of emergency relief activities in Africa and Asia. A humanitarian relief unit equipped to respond promptly to emergency needs had been set up; a roster of over 100 standby candidates already existed and a number of assignments, mainly of short duration, had been made to WFP, UNHCR and other United Nations agencies. Discussions with UNHCR were in progress on methods of rapid recruitment and the speedy deployment of selected candidates. In that connection, UNV planned to set up a "rapid deployment arrangement" for recruiting and dispatching pre-screened UNV emergency relief officers resident in or near affected regions.

65. The second area for specific cooperation was repatriation. A number of the 20 or so United Nations volunteers currently working with UNHCR in Southeast Asia were serving as voluntary repatriation and social counsellors. Cooperation in that priority area could well be expanded to other regions.

66. Thirdly, UNV was uniquely well placed to act as a bridge between the initial emergency relief phase and the stage requiring durable solutions by promoting partnership between UNHCR, to which UNV specialists were assigned, and UNDP, to which the UNV programme belonged administratively. In El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, United Nations volunteers had played an important role both in refugee repatriation programmes carried out by UNHCR and in reconstruction and development activities financed by UNDP. The UNV programme was also taking steps to emphasize its community orientation.

67. Lastly, UNV could assist UNHCR in securing professional expertise at reduced costs. Although United Nations volunteers were mature specialists with several years of professional experience, they did not demand any financial remuneration for their services, so that the cost of a typical assignment was only a third or a quarter of that of hiring regular experts and technicians. The costs of maintaining the 425 United Nations volunteers in Cambodia who constituted a major component of the international civilian personnel attached to UNTAC amounted to only $18 million, including administrative overheads, and that was a fraction of the more than $1 billion required for the UNTAC operations as a whole.

68. Mr. JENNY (International Organization for Migration) said that the long cooperation between UNHCR and IOM had continued during the previous year and

that the complementary mandates of the two organizations had enabled them to reinforce each other's efforts in a number of situations. IOM's broad migration mandate, which included, but was not limited to refugees, was of particular relevance in its cooperation with UNHCR at a time when new forms of displacement made it increasingly difficult to distinguish clearly between refugee situations and other forms of displacement and migration requiring international attention. The two organizations maintained a regular dialogue to determine areas in which complementary or joint action was required. The Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799) contained a number of elements directly relevant to IOM functions and activities in the migration field and IOM would like to consult with UNHCR on the subject in the months ahead.

69. Citing examples of cooperation between IOM and UNHCR, he said that, in Europe, they were jointly operating a migration information project for Albania with the primary objective of reducing emigration pressures from that country. They also cooperated closely in institution-building efforts in various States of the former Soviet Union through the organization of training workshops and seminars for Government officials in those countries. In the former Yugoslavia, IOM cooperated with UNHCR and other agencies in providing transportation assistance to persons displaced as a result of the hostilities. The two institutions had also worked out a common platform on the issue of organized return programmes for asylum seekers who could not obtain recognition as refugees.

70. In Asia, cooperation with UNHCR under the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees continued in various fields. The IOM-operated orderly departure programme from Viet Nam remained of key importance; some 91,000 persons would have been assisted by IOM under the programme by the end of 1992. At the same time, IOM continued to assist UNHCR under the voluntary return programme to Viet Nam. In Cambodia, where UNHCR was leading the global repatriation effort, IOM was supporting the return of highly qualified Khmer experts under a programme forming part of the reconstruction and rehabilitation effort for that country. In Afghanistan, IOM was carrying out logistical tasks to facilitate the repatriation of Afghan refugees. In Africa, IOM had assisted UNHCR under the return programme for South African exiles and, in Latin America, the joint venture for the repatriation of Chilean exiles had continued.

71. Mr. NORDBY (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) drew attention to the growth of racism and xenophobia in many industrialized countries, including some with a tradition of strong commitment to refugee protection. The main issue at present was not so much the adequacy of UNHCR and other international institutions as the existence or non-existence of a political will to support them. In humanitarian operations, especially those in complex emergency situations, United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, including UNHCR, were failing to work together as closely as they should.

72. In the case of the crisis in Somalia, confusion took the place of a planned and coordinated emergency response. None of the international organizations present in that country was acting as the lead agency. The activities of the new United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs had not lived up to the international community's high expectations. The role which the Department intended to play in countries such as Somalia and Mozambique was still unclear, as was the relationship between it and non-governmental organizations in those emergencies, as well as in future ones.

73. While agreeing that, in some situations temporary protection was appropriate and permanent relocation unnecessary, ICVA considered that, where temporary protection was offered it had to meet the standards of protection and humane treatment set out in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799). UNHCR's role in ensuring the protection of refugees should also include repatriation and reintegration; the removal of mines, economic development, reintegration and the provision of food and shelter were essential in ensuring that the return in cases of voluntary repatriation took place in safety and dignity.

74. Non-governmental organizations played a major role both in countries receiving mass influxes of refugees and in countries of origin. UNHCR and NGO presence could have a deterrent effect on human rights violations in some countries. Non-governmental organizations could also contribute usefully to protection operations linked to assistance activities. Some organizations were able to second staff to UNHCR for protection purposes, undertake monitoring activities and report violations of the human rights of refugees and internally displaced persons and could also assume certain protection responsibilities in repatriation operations under UNHCR auspices.

75. ICVA was seriously concerned about the restrictive and deterrent policies which were being introduced by more and more OECD countries and which could make the right to seek and to enjoy asylum completely meaningless. Such measures were being taken in the context an increasingly narrow and illiberal interpretation of the 1951 Convention. ICVA was also concerned about the marginalization of UNHCR in consultations which had taken place with North American and European States and which, although characterized as informal, could be more accurately described as secret.

76. Turning to regional concerns, he said that preparing for the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Mozambican refugees and internally displaced persons had become a matter of urgency, especially in view of new influxes of Mozambicans to Malawi which had brought the refugee population in that country to a dangerous all-time high. An international conference to facilitate preparations for an integrated regional plan of action had been held earlier in the year in Oslo and an inter-agency conference on the same issue was scheduled to take place shortly in Maputo. ICVA was to host an NGO consultation in Mozambique early in 1993 with a view to coordinating NGO activities within the overall regional plan for repatriation and reintegration.

77. ICVA called on UNHCR to cooperate closely with central and local authorities in Afghanistan; and its cooperation with NGOs, which had improved recently, could be developed further. There was agreement on the international community's priorities in the repatriation programme, about which ICVA was somewhat concerned. Funding was insufficient for all the requirements, which included rehabilitation and reconstruction.

78. ICVA welcomed the opening provided by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to include international NGOs in refugee work; many NGOs were ready to start activities for Afghan, Iraqi and other refugees, as well as other affected populations in Iran. With regard to refugees from Palestine, ICVA had stated at the Executive Committee's forty-second session that there were large numbers of Palestinians not receiving UNRWA assistance, although those who were refugees as defined in paragraph 6 of the Statute were entitled to UNHCR protection and aid.

79. The Second International Meeting of the CIREFCA Follow-up Committee had confirmed the need to continue the search for durable solutions for populations affected by political violence and human rights violations and had stressed the urgent need to continue coordinated efforts to achieve viable solutions. ICVA acknowledged the role played by UNHCR in the important CIREFCA process. It also encouraged the Guatemalan Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) to maintain the peace negotiations. It drew particular attention to issues such as the need to respect refugees' voluntary decisions to return in an organized, collective manner in dignity and security and the need for UNHCR to strengthen its physical presence in repatriation zones until the returnees had been fully integrated.

80. ICVA also urged UNHCR to maintain a presence in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia to monitor external and internal displacement, to follow up requests for refugee status and to urge Governments to apply in full the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and other relevant international agreements.

81. In the former Yugoslavia, ICVA had established a task force and obtained the services of a Coordinator, the main objective being to improve coordination among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and with United Nations agencies. It had also sent a delegation to the Republic of Armenia in August 1992 and would shortly be sending one to the Republic of Azerbaijan. It invited UNHCR to note its report on the situation of refugees in Armenia and welcomed the dispatch, by the High Commissioner, of a delegation to Armenia and Azerbaijan. ICVA had established a consortium through which NGOs could respond to the needs of refugees in Armenia.

82. With reference to the High Commissioner's challenge on partnership, NGOs would continue to play a crucial role both independently of UNHCR and as partners. ICVA was anxious to increase the NGO community's partnership activity.

83. Lastly, ICVA encouraged the Executive Committee to facilitate UNHCR's work by urging those member States which obstructed the High Commissioner's programmes to comply fully with their international obligations.

84. Mr. DECASES (Sovereign Order of Malta) said that his organization's work in providing assistance to refugees stemmed not only from its members' calling, but from the obligations set forth in its Constitutional Charter. Despite its limited resources, it was trying to help solve the grave problems in that field, in pursuance of the ideals of Christian charity and fraternal solidarity which had inspired it, for almost 900 years, to work for the alleviation of human suffering.

85. The Sovereign Order had taken note of the High Commissioner's opening statement, particularly with regard to the problems posed by the growing number of refugees in Africa, Asia and even in Europe, which had now reached a figure of over 18 million. Its efforts to share in the international community's assistance for those forced to abandon their homes included recent activities in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Lebanon. In Africa, it had worked chiefly in Ethiopia and Somalia and, in Europe, it had provided assistance to refugees from Albania and to those from the former Yugoslavia who had arrived in Austria, Hungary and Italy. It had also operated in Croatia. Its work was made possible through contributions and participation by its staff or national groups of its members.

86. The Sovereign Order was firmly committed to mobilizing its efforts wholeheartedly and to the utmost together with all those who worked, through UNHCR, ICRC and other international agencies, and all too often in peril, to bring help to so many innocent victims.

87. The CHAIRMAN said that the debate had attested to the magnitude of the refugee problem throughout the world, but had also shown that there was a high degree of international solidarity and commitment to achieve common humanitarian goals. He declared the general debate concluded.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.